

# OpenTheo

## November 16th: Isaiah 29 & Luke 2:22-52

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### Alastair Roberts

The spiritual insensitivity of Jerusalem. The presentation in the Temple.

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## Transcript

Isaiah chapter 29. Your voice shall come from the ground like the voice of a ghost, and from the dust your speech shall whisper. But the multitude of your foreign foes shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the ruthless like passing chaff.

And in an instant, suddenly, you will be visited by the Lord of hosts, with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire. And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, all that fight against her and her stronghold and distress her, shall be like a dream, a vision of the night. As when a hungry man dreams, and behold he is eating, and awakes with his hunger not satisfied, or as when a thirsty man dreams, and behold he is drinking, and awakes faint, with his thirst not quenched, so shall the multitude of all the nations be that fight against Mount Zion.

Astonish yourselves, and be astonished. Blind yourselves, and be blind. Be drunk, but not with wine.

Stagger, but not with strong drink. For the Lord has poured out upon you a spirit of deep

sleep, and has closed your eyes, the prophets, and covered your heads, the seers. And the vision of all this has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed.

When men give it to one who can read, saying, read this, he says, I cannot, for it is sealed. And when they give the book to one who cannot read, saying, read this, he says, I cannot read. And the Lord said, because this people draw near with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men.

Therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder, and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden. Ah, you who hide deep from the Lord your counsel, whose deeds are in the dark, and who say, Who sees us? Who knows us? You turn things upside down. Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, He did not make me, or the thing formed say of him who formed it, he has no understanding.

Is it not yet a very little while until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest? In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel. For the ruthless shall come to nothing, and the scoffers cease, and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off, who by a word make a man out to be an offender, and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate, and with an empty plea turn aside him who is in the right.

Therefore thus says the Lord who redeemed Abraham concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall no more be ashamed, no more shall his face grow pale, for when he sees his children, the work of my hands in his midst, they will sanctify my name, they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. And those who go astray in spirit will come to understanding, and those who murmur will accept instruction. Isaiah chapter 29 is the second chapter in the larger section running from chapter 28 to 39, and in the subsection from chapter 28 to 33.

In the preceding sections from chapters 13 to 27, Isaiah addressed the nations and the judgments that the Lord was going to bring upon them, immediately through Assyria in the years around 701 BC, and later through Babylon. Chapters 13 to 23 contained the oracles concerning the nations, and chapters 24 to 27 a more general eschatological vision of the Lord's judgment and transformation of the earth. The chapters from chapter 28 also deal with the years leading up to 701 BC, and Assyria's invasion of Judah.

However the focus is now upon Judah itself, which seems to be turning to Egypt for aid, rather than to the Lord. There are five repetitions of woe in this larger section, in chapter 28 verse 1, in chapter 29 verse 1, verse 15, in chapter 30 verse 1, 31 verse 1, and 33

verse 1. In the preceding chapter, Israel was described as engaged in drunken revelries, insensitive to the dreadful fate that was about to come upon it. The beginning of the woe oracle of chapter 29 speaks of another city that is dull to its situation in its celebration of feasts, Jerusalem's feasts here seem to be the feasts of the festal calendar, but the implication is that they are being celebrated in a manner that produces the same moral insensitivity, perhaps on the basis of some measure of the sort of presumption described back in chapter 1. They are continually going through the repeated motions of the annual feasts, yet are getting no nearer to God.

The meaning of the term Ariel is debated by scholars, while various proposals for the meaning of the term have been advanced, for instance, as a lion of God, the most likely is that it is a reference to the altar. The term is used with that sense in Ezekiel chapter 43 verses 15 and 16. This would be a fitting term for a description of Jerusalem that centers the cult of the temple, as the reference to the annual feasts in verse 1 might support.

It would also be a fitting term for the wordplay at the end of verse 2, where Jerusalem is not merely referred to as Ariel, but where the Lord says that she will be to him like an Ariel. Jerusalem, the city of the altar, would become like an altar, with the nation the sacrifice to be offered upon it. David had encamped in Jerusalem, in verse 1, making it his capital.

However, the Lord would encamp against the city, seen in the forces of the invading Assyrians. This encamping against Jerusalem would involve the erection of siege works and towers, for which the Assyrians were renowned. Jerusalem and Judah would be brought down to the dust and the earth, perhaps to be understood as a claim that they would descend to the grave, becoming little more than the shadowy ghost of a departed city.

Yet although they might consider the foreign power that so defeated them to be invincible and invulnerable, that foe was actually like dust and chaff on the threshing floor, which would be easily removed when the wind of the Lord came upon them. And come upon them it would. In theophanic language, which might recall the appearance of the Lord at Sinai, for instance, verses 5 and 6 describe the terrible advent of the Lord.

In the face of the Lord's glorious appearance, the nations would be like a dream, which swiftly vanishes and is forgotten when one awakes. As the dream describes a man thinking that his hunger or thirst is being satisfied, when in fact he will await to discover that his hunger hasn't been assuaged nor his thirst quenched. So Assyria would find that Jerusalem, upon which it fancied it would feast, has been removed from its clutches.

However, as verse 10 describes Jerusalem's own leaders as insensible, it is also possible that they are the ones referred to here, with the point being the unreality of a dream. As if frustrated with the insensitivity of the people to the word of the Lord, the prophet tells

them completely to incapacitate themselves, like making themselves blind or drunk. In this, they would merely be enacting the judgment of insensitivity to the word of the Lord that the Lord has afflicted them with.

Earlier in the book, in Isaiah's commission in chapter 6 verses 9 and 10, the Lord had said to him, Go and say to this people, Keep on hearing, but do not understand. Keep on seeing, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.

The judgment with which they were judged particularly afflicted their prophets and seers, those who were supposed to give the people guidance and vision from the Lord. As the pressing issues of the day were those of foreign policy, the word of the prophets who had guidance from the Lord would be particularly important. Yet the vision of the Lord, described in verses 11 and 12, had become like a closed book to the people.

The book was sealed, and even if it were opened, they would not have the wisdom and the knowledge to read it. All of their supposed worship and devotion to the Lord is superficial and hollow. They pay lip service to the Lord, they go through the religious motions, but their hearts are far from him, and what might appear to the unaware as genuine religious devotion is merely a rote following of the teaching of the priests.

The Lord, however, is going to shake things up. He's going to bring a shock upon the people, performing wonders that dismay all of their wise men. Verses 15 and 16 describe what is likely the planning of the counsellors of Hezekiah, who are seeking to form an alliance with Egypt, rather than heeding what the Lord has said concerning the situation.

The Lord had said that he would crush the Assyrians, and that they should not turn to Egypt, and yet they are acting as if they can keep their planning secret from him, as if he would not hold them to account. All of this is, as the Lord says, to turn things upside down. It is the Lord who is the creator, it is the Lord who is the potter, it is the Lord whose plans will not fall to the ground.

In their great presumption, they think that they are wiser than God. In just a short period of time, if only they would heed the Lord, there would be a dramatic reversal of the situation. Verse 17 might be referring to barren places made fruitful, or alternatively, to the cutting down of great trees.

It seems more likely to me that there is a reversal being emphasised here. The great trees of Lebanon would be brought down, and the land would be made into a fruitful field, and on the other hand, the fruitful field would become a mighty forest of cedars. Great trees elsewhere represent the powers and rulers of a people.

The mighty would be brought low, and the weak of the people lifted up. The spiritual

insensitivity of the people described earlier in the chapter would also be addressed. Blindness and deafness would be reversed, and people would hear the word of the Lord.

The poor and the meek would rejoice in the Lord. The ruthless, the scoffer, and those who watch to do evil would all be cut off. The ruthless are the cruel and oppressive.

The scoffers are those who actively undermine the law of the Lord, by mocking both it and the righteous, and those who watch to do evil are predatory oppressors. In the following verse, we see that these people are using the perversion of justice to get their ways. They are using false testimony, with a word making a man out to be an offender.

They are using legal trips and traps to subvert and frustrate the righteous in his cause, and they are using the multiplication of empty words to obscure justice. In verse 22, the Lord brings the patriarchs into the picture, Abraham and Jacob. Jacob, who has formerly been ashamed looking at his offspring, will no longer be so.

His descendants will come to honour the Lord as holy, and even those who have gone astray will be reformed. A question to consider at the end of this chapter, with the reference to Jacob and Abraham, issues of spiritual paternity are brought into view. What are some of the ways in which we see scripture using people's relationship with their forefathers as a means of exhortation and challenge? Luke chapter 2 verses 22 to 52  
Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parishioners had come to him, And his parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law. He took him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, And his father and his mother marvelled at what was said about him.

And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary his mother, And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day.

And coming up at that very hour, she began to give thanks to God, and to speak of Him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew, and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favour of God was upon him.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended,

as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group, they went at day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances.

And when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress. And he said to them, Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my father's house? And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.

And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man.

The second half of Luke chapter 2 recounts the presentation of Jesus in the temple and his visit to the temple as a twelve-year-old. In both cases, Jesus is being associated closely with the temple, which he terms his father's house in verse 49. We will also see some resemblance with the character of the child Samuel, the descriptions of whose growth Luke has borrowed as his model for describing Jesus and John.

We are moving through landmarks of Jesus' infancy and childhood here. His birth, circumcision, his presentation in the temple, and then later a visit to the temple for Passover at the age of twelve. When we think about a forty-day period at the beginning of Luke's gospel, we might think of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness after his baptism.

But there is an earlier example of a forty-day period, found in this chapter. Jesus was presented in the temple on the fortieth day after his birth, according to the law. This is grounded upon the commandments of Exodus chapter 13, verses 2, 12 and 15, and also Leviticus chapter 12.

Consecrate to me all the firstborn, whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine. You shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the Lord's.

For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem. Those are from Exodus chapter 13, now Leviticus chapter 12.

The Lord spoke to Moses saying, Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If a woman

conceives and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days. As at the time of her menstruation she shall be unclean, and on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Then she shall continue for thirty-three days in the blood of her purifying.

She shall not touch anything holy, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying are completed. But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her menstruation, and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying for sixty-six days. And when the days of her purifying are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb a year old for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtle dove for a sin offering, and he shall offer it before the Lord and make atonement for her.

Then she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, either male or female. And if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtle doves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering, and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean.

Mary and Joseph bring two birds for their sacrifices, which seems to be an indication of their poverty. Both Simeon and Anna are elderly. Simeon is nearing death and Anna is eighty-four years old.

There is an indication of the lengthy time spent in anticipation by Israel here. The new life of Jesus and John and the hope and the expectation that they bring is juxtaposed with the hopes of the aged. Zechariah and Elizabeth are also examples of this, serving to accent the way that the Lord is bringing new life, as it were, from the dead.

Another thing to notice is the way that Luke consistently highlights male and female pairings. We've already had Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, and now we have Simeon and Anna. These are different generations.

There's the aged pair of Simeon and Anna. There's the late middle-aged couple of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and then there's the young couple of Mary and Joseph. God's coming salvation is speaking to all generations.

In Jesus, God's salvation has already arrived. Holding a forty-day-old infant, Simeon can say that he has seen God's salvation. Simeon has a profound experience of the Spirit, one that seems ahead of its redemptive historical time.

The Holy Spirit is upon him. The Holy Spirit has revealed to him that he will not die before he sees the Lord's Christ, and then the Spirit brings him into the temple. The sheer extent of the work of the Spirit in the life of Simeon seems to look forward to the time of Pentecost.

This is not the sort of language that we find in the Old Testament that much, but it's

something that we see a lot in the Book of Acts. The Lord keeps his promise to Simeon, and now he feels able to depart. We might be reminded of Jacob's response to meeting Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph, in Genesis chapter 48.

Simeon's prophecy emphasizes the fact that Jesus is a light of revelation to the Gentiles, but his later remarks also make apparent that Jesus will be a deeply divisive figure in the nation of Israel. His song draws very heavily upon the prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah chapter 40 verse 5 And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Isaiah chapter 42 verse 6 I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I will take you by the hand and keep you, I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations. Isaiah chapter 46 verse 13 I bring near my righteousness, it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay. I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.

Isaiah chapter 49 verse 6 He says, It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel. I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. Isaiah chapter 51 verses 4 to 5 Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation, for a law will go out from me, and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples.

My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples. The coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait. Isaiah chapter 52 verse 10 The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Isaiah chapter 60 verses 1 to 3 Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples. But the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.

And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Simeon blesses Mary and Joseph, and he declares that a sword will pierce through Mary's soul also. This seems to be a reference either to the family divisions that she will experience, the fact that some of her own children and some of her relatives will be pulling against Christ, even while she recognizes the truth of his mission and the nature of his identity.

And then there's also the fact that she will experience the suffering as he suffers, as she witnesses her son going through the most intense agony on the cross. A sword will pierce through her own soul also. She enters into the sufferings of her son.

Simeon announces that Christ is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel. The order is significant, it's death followed by resurrection. He will also be a sign that is opposed.

Anna comes after Simeon. She's a widow of 84 years old. 84 years, 12 by 7, two very



highly significant numbers.

She represents the fullness of Israel. Such details are not given to us by accident. She represents the state of the nation, of the faithful of the nation.

She's another Hannah, fasting and praying in the temple, seeking God's salvation. In Simeon and Anna we see faithful people, exemplary Israelites. In Anna's case, a fact expressed by the symbolism of her age.

These people are waiting for the redemption of Israel. They're greeting the newborn saviour as they near death. They can go to their deaths in peace because they have seen that he has been born.

Anna is continually fasting and praying in the temple and later the disciples are continually blessing and praising God in the temple. There is a parallel here. After this they return to the town of Nazareth where Jesus grows up.

And again the description of Jesus growing up is taken from the example of Samuel. We don't have the account of the flight into Egypt here but that intervenes between these events presumably. They go down into Egypt and then they decide to move back up to her hometown of Nazareth rather than settling in Bethlehem as presumably had been their initial plan.

In the story that follows, Jesus is 12 years old. He journeys with his family to Jerusalem for the Passover. He is lost and then found again after three days.

He asks his mother and father, much as he would later ask the two travellers on the road out of Jerusalem to Emmaus, why they didn't understand his true calling. Mary kept all of this in her heart. And I can imagine that looking back upon it 20 years later, she would have marveled to see Christ's destiny being so clearly and powerfully prefigured in his earlier life.

The true significance of the strange and mysterious events that Mary had pondered for over two or more decades would suddenly be revealed following Christ's resurrection. Once again at the Passover feast, Jesus would be lost. People would seek for him and he would be found on the third day.

The text speaks of the parents going up to Jerusalem for the feast every year, just as Samuel's parents went up to the temple every year. Samuel was left behind in the temple by his parents, being lent to the Lord by his parents. Jesus was accidentally left behind in the temple by his parents, reminding them of his true father and that he was temporarily lent to them by the Lord.

1 Samuel 1, verses 20-28 reads, And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, I have asked for him from the Lord. The man

Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, so that he may appear in the presence of the Lord and dwell there forever.

Elkanah her husband said to her, Do what seems best to you, wait until you have weaned him, only may the Lord establish his word. So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him. And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephor of flour, and a skin of wine, and she brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh.

And the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, O my Lord, as you live, my Lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord.

For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord.

And he worshipped the Lord there. The story of Jesus' precocious spiritual wisdom in the temple is reminiscent of the story of Samuel. The description of Jesus growing up in verse 52 also echoes that of Samuel in 1 Samuel 2, verse 26.

Samuel is the prophet who ends the old order of Israel. He foretells judgment on the priestly house and establishes the kingdom. Christ declares judgment upon the temple and the priestly house of Israel, ends the old covenant, and establishes the kingdom of God.

This is a passage filled with joy and rejoicing. But we're also seeing ominous foreshadowing of the cross. But beyond that, I think we might be seeing foreshadowing of something else.

I wonder whether this foreshadows the events of Pentecost. I mentioned in the story of Simeon that there are so many references to the Spirit in association with Simeon that it seems like a story out of place. It seems like something that we'd find in the book of Acts.

And I don't think that's accidental. Forty days after Jesus' birth, he goes to the temple. Forty days after his resurrection, he enters the heavenly temple.

He ascends into God's presence. We may in fact wonder whether there's a connection between the sacrifices that are offered for the purification and the events of Pentecost. The sacrifice of purification after childbirth involved a dove as a purification offering and an ascension offering of a lamb.

Christ is the ascended lamb that goes into God's presence and the dove of the Spirit is

that which cleanses the church by faith. Perhaps there's some connection there. I'm not sure, but it's worth looking into.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is only mentioned once in the book of Acts and that is immediately after the ascension when she joins the rest of the disciples and they are praying constantly in the upper room in the temple. Perhaps we are supposed to think of some connection with the event of the presentation in the temple. The constancy of Anna in prayer in the temple is similar to the way that the disciples will be constant in prayer after the ascension.

And the presence also of Simeon as one who comes in in the power of the Spirit and delivers this speech may make us think of the one other prominent character in the gospel that Luke refers to as Simeon and that is Simon Peter who is referred to as Simeon in Acts chapter 15. In Luke chapter 2, Simeon prophesies concerning the newborn Jesus. In Acts chapter 2, Simeon Peter preaches and prophesies concerning Christ, the firstborn from the dead.

The gospel of Luke has several symmetries both within itself and in its relationship to the book of Acts. It seems to me that this might well be one of them. A question to consider, what might Simeon have meant by saying that Jesus would be a sign that is opposed so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed?